

THE TEXTILE MUSEUM OF TERRASSA

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COPTIC WOOL AND LINEN FABRIC (IVth AND Vth CENTURIES)

MUSEU TÈXTIL DE TERRASSA
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For many years, people everywhere have been saying that the Textile Museum of Terrassa is the third of its kind in Europe. Similarly, not so long ago, someone said it deserved the qualification of "national". Today, the work-team are totally unconcerned about these commonplaces; all they care about is making it a centre of use to the textile industry and to the general public.

Looking back, the museum has a curious and remarkably interesting history as an exponent of the mentality of the dominant classes in our country during the post-war years. The Museu Tèxtil went through what we could call

a period of gestation –between the forties and the end of the sixties– and saw the light in 1970 as the sum of various private collections placed under one roof and jointly administered by the Terrassa City Council and the Barcelona County Corporation. It is therefore a recently established museum, but one marked from its beginnings by an outmoded approach based on having objects of the greatest possible value (in the exotic sense, chronologically and culturally speaking) and on having a lot.

This explains why it has such an enormous collection, basically of silks –in a predominantly wool-producing region

and country– and why there is such a severe lack of documentation, since collectors had shown little interest in having precise information about the origin and background of each exhibit. It is also one of the few Catalan museums housed in purpose-built premises, although –probably because of remoteness from what was going on in the rest of the world at that time– this failed to offer any advantages as regards conservation or exhibition space, which was excessively rigid.

But this is a thing of the past. A past that weighs on us –no doubt– but one that not only allows transformation but even, because of the challenge involved,



NASRID SILK CURTAIN. GRANADA (XVth and XVIth CENTURIES)

makes it more attractive. The Textile Museum today is the site of considerable activity, both inside and outside, in a move to maintain the delicate balance between the necessary work of conservation and documentation, active participation in the textile sector and its role as an attraction for the non-professional public.

The museum has a good collection of "Coptic" Egyptian fabrics from the late Roman period and early Middle Ages, an excellent collection of cloths from the Arab workshops of Al-Andalus –particularly from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries–, some beautiful examples of Renaissance Mediterranean velvet and brocade, and an impressive collection –the most important part of the museum from the point of view of quantity– of brocades, damasks and all sorts of fabrics from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. After this, clothing plays the largest part, covering the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while the twentieth century is represented by a series of *haute-couture* models and samples from local industries. Recent purchasing policy has naturally tended to cover these later periods and, especially, to document the local textile industry. Various pieces of machinery –those that are essential to an understanding of the complexity of the textile process– have also been included.

As we see it, though, the work of the museum does not end here. Having a good collection is only the beginning. What is important is, first of all, to make this collection accessible and easy to consult for designers, manufacturers, teachers and students at textile colleges, researchers, etc. Work is therefore going ahead on the preparation of an illustrated data base which will allow our collection to be archived along with those of other organisations, so that they can be studied together. For this reason, also, the museum belongs to the European Textile Network (ETN) and is committed to the initiative arising from different organisms in the Vallès region to form a Centre d'Excel·lència Tèxtil (Textile Quality Centre) which will concentrate the different training opportunities and levels in this speciality.

The contribution the Museu Tèxtil makes to training is an important one. In a world in which employees change from one company to another with increasing ease, many people find themselves working in the textile industry without any knowledge of fabric manufacture or spinning. These people are in need of a quick, overall preparation which they will not receive in their technical training. The museum offers them practical courses and courses aimed at fomenting "textile culture" amongst designers, artisans, teachers, etc. These courses are held in collaboration with the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and professionals, and have always been very well received.

The textile industry is not a closed field, though. Contrary to what one might think, a simple piece of cloth can have a lot to say. Fabrics can equally well speak of the natural surroundings, geography, economy, technology, mathematics, chemistry or history. This is why our centre is equipped with a workshop in which teachers can, with the help of someone from the museum, work on topics previously agreed with the students. Terrassa's Educational Resources Centre has been a great help in this respect and there are more and more boys and girls working in the



NIGHT GOWN BY PEDRO RODRÍGUEZ, 1950

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classrooms.

At the same time, as regards the general public, the museum wants to do more than just exhibit fabrics. What we want to do is to add to the interest of the exhibitions through themes that can be changed regularly so that people keep coming back. The museum's pieces can be complemented with others from outside and the fabrics can be related to ceramics, furniture, painting, or anything else that helps put them into context and makes other periods and other atmospheres more easily understandable. After all, objects are no more than a pretext, a way of visualizing the idea we are trying to put across. With this in mind, the museum has prepared the first of its own productions, the recently inaugurated exhibition "Silk: legend, power and reality", soon to go on tour, which earned the category of Associated Project to the UNESCO programme "The Silk Roads, the Roads of Dialogue". The museum is also the official home of the Silk Route Commission, which promotes cultural itineraries connected with silk and encourages research in this field.

The museum intends to continue progressing and is whole-heartedly committed to increasing profitability and maintaining constant communication with similar organisations all over the world. ■